

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE
BUILDING ON OUR COMMUNITY’S COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGES

By Mayor Gene Winstead

In the past year, you may have heard several, sometimes contradictory, statements that may have left you a bit confused about how the Bloomington you live in and enjoy compares competitively with other large communities.

Bloomington has been home to people for centuries, from the Native Americans living on the Minnesota River bluff to farming communities and small settlements to the traditional suburbs that grew out of World War II. In the 1960s a decision was made to take advantage of Bloomington’s central location near highways, while creating a balance of residential and commercial/ industrial development. Today, that goal has been achieved. Residential properties represent half of the community’s tax base.

As a City Council, we look to continue renewing our community by building on the competitive advantage we have today, which is a result of past City Councils’ work to be a more economically, fiscally, environmentally and socially sustainable community.



This next year, some major district improvements will move forward, including the South Loop District, an important commercial and employment center located immediately south of the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport, *see page 1*, and the Penn-American District, *see page 3*, located on Penn Avenue and American Boulevard, which will include a mix of retail, office

and residential spaces. Improvements to the Hwy. 169 and I-494 interchange began this past fall, *see page 3*.

Our community vitality is further evidenced by ongoing investment in the city over the past several years, as reflected in the number of building permits drawn and inspections conducted in 2010. The number of inspections in 2010 was slightly over 19,000 – 93 percent of the 5-year average total inspections, ranging from 8 - 16 inspections per day, depending on the workload of inspectors. Our goal is to have the services we provide, from a property tax and water/sewer utility fees standpoint, remain very competitive. As noted in several 2010 *Briefing* columns, Bloomington is among the most competitive cities in terms of cost and quality. The property tax cost of City services for a single-family lot is just under \$80 per month. If you pay more or less than that monthly amount, it is the result of a Minnesota property tax system that spreads the city’s property tax cost to properties based on the proportional market value of the type of property. (A median valued home pays \$67.82 per month.) In these more difficult economic times, many of us would like to reduce our overall tax load. Given that property taxes support many City services, a significant reduction in property taxes should be accompanied by a concurrent, strategic reduction in services so that we do not incur costs today that will burden future generations. As a Council, we prioritize property tax-supported services to determine if adjustments to services are necessary.

For 2011, while many of our city counterparts held their levies flat or increased them, Bloomington approved a slight reduction to the levy compared to 2010. Strong financial management and keeping service levels during better times at levels that could be supported during more difficult times, allows the City to continue to provide the

services you rely on. There has been little downturn in our service demands, as is typical of past downturns, and the demand for some City services has increased. Although other government agencies, such as Hennepin County, may provide a few similar services, having them available locally offers many benefits at a cost of under 5 percent of your City property tax bill. For example, the City is able to more than quadruple its investment in public health services for the community by leveraging grants, contracts, fees for services and other funding sources, greatly expanding the level of service available to Bloomington residents. While many of our financial assets are dedicated to specific purposes such as infrastructure renewal, using City assets to lower property taxes in the short term could cost us our AAA bond rating, the highest rating available, which allows us to borrow money at very good rates, including some at less than our investment assets are earning. Moreover, we are using the expected positive performance from 2010 to fund our 2011 fire pension obligation for volunteer firefighters avoiding the use of property taxes to fund it in 2012 - 2016, which would be the situation if the City were to issue debt.

Short term reactions can end up costing all of us in the long term. Ultimately, the services that you pay for through your property taxes support the investment you have made in this community and are often a savings over what it would cost you to pay for these services individually or to go without them, thereby increasing your insurance costs. As we look forward to 2011 and beyond, we see continued investment by people in the homes and businesses in our community as well as investments in areas such as Penn-American and South Loop. These investments strengthen the City and benefit us all.

WEBSITE KEYWORDS: JUST THE FACTS.

Additional changes to the Animal Ordinance include regulations to help prevent nuisance conditions such as odors, noise, and attracting vermin and predators.

“The City hopes that these restructured regulations will allow residents who own large single-family lots to continue raising chickens in a manner that respects neighboring properties,” Moore said.

For more information on the Animal Ordinance, call Environmental Health Manager Lynn Moore at 952-563-8970 or visit the City’s website at www.ci.bloomington.mn.us/code and navigate to Chapter 12.

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The City of Bloomington complies with all applicable provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and does not discriminate on the basis of disability in the admission or access to, or treatment or employment in, its services, programs, or activities. Upon request, accommodation will be provided to allow individuals with disabilities to participate in all City of Bloomington services, programs, and activities. The City has designated coordinators to facilitate compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), and to coordinate compliance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as mandated by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development regulations. For more information, contact the Human Services Division, City of Bloomington, 1800 West Old Shakopee Road, Bloomington, MN 55431-3027; 952-563-8733 (Voice); 952-563-8740 (TTY).

Upon request, this information can be available in Braille, large print, audio tape and/or electronic format.

CHANGES MADE TO CITY ANIMAL ORDINANCE
NEW REGULATIONS FOR BACKYARD CHICKENS FINALIZED

The City updated its regulations for animals in residential neighborhoods to reflect the significant changes since Bloomington’s early years as a farming community.

According to Environmental Health Manager Lynn Moore, last spring the City discovered that several Bloomington residents had chickens on their properties. After researching other cities’ ordinances and hosting public hearings on the proposed animal ordinance changes, the regulations were approved. The Council voted to continue to allow chickens to be kept on residential lots that meet certain standards.

Chickens must be kept in a clean shelter, no larger than 120 square feet. The shelter (coop) and enclosure (run) must be at least 50 feet from all neighboring property lines. Shelters and enclosures must be screened from view by a minimum of a four-foot high solid fence.

The owners of the chickens must occupy the home on the property where chickens are kept and chickens cannot be kept inside the home or garage. The new regulations also limit the number of chickens a resident can keep to four hens and prohibit roosters, cockfighting, slaughtering and breeding.